

REMINISCENCES OF THE STEELYARD FORMERLY
IN UPPER THAMES STREET,
WITH AN ACCOUNT OF SOME OF THE ANTIQUITIES LATELY
DISCOVERED ON ITS SITE.

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(Read at the Evening Meeting, 13 June, 1864.)

I HAVE to direct your attention this evening to a series of Roman and mediæval antiquities, some of which were exhibited at our meeting at Ironmongers' Hall, obtained from the extensive excavations for the City Extension of the South-Eastern Railway, on the south side of Thames Street, between Dowgate Dock and Allhallows Church, comprising the site of the old Steelyard. As these diggings are completed, a record of the discovery should find a place in the Journal of the Society; but, before proceeding to the antiquities, we may consider the history of the locality whence they have been obtained.

The meaning of the name "Steelyard" has been differently defined. By some it is said to have originated in the fact of its being "the place where the King's Steelyard or beam was erected for weighing goods imported into London."* By the German author Lappenburg it is ascribed to stapelhof or staplhof, a word which, like its English synonym staple, signifies an emporium for imported goods. Such meaning is appropriate enough; for during a long period the place was both the centre of London's trade and the scene of a complete monopoly of British commerce by the merchants of the Hanseatic League. So early as the eighth century this commercial confederacy existed. It consisted of various traders from a number of the continental towns, who carried on a large business in exporting

* This opinion was entertained by that experienced antiquary Mr. T. Hudson Turner, who also informed the author of *The Handbook for London*, that, when the tonnage was transferred to the Corporation of the City, the King's beam was removed first to Ceculhill, and afterwards to Weigh-house Yard in Little East Cheap.

their manufactures to London in exchange for hides, wool, tin, lead, and other products of British industry. These merchants are first heard of in the reign of Ethelred, 979, when the Emperor's men, as they were called, upon coming in their ships to Billingsgate, "were accounted worthy of good laws." The company was a very extensive one; but its most important branch, and the one with which we have more particularly to deal, was the "Easterlings," who had their settlement in London. Their factory and warehouses formerly occupied the Steelyard. Disputes arose with the Cologne merchants, who held part of Dowgate, on account of the Hanse traders so monopolising English trade. An amalgamation was the result, subsequently known as the merchants of Almaine, who possess the house in London called the Dutch Guildhall, "*Aula Teutonicorum.*" Among the Harleian MSS. there occur "Grauntes of Priviledges by Kings of England from Henry III. to Edward VI. to the Haunses or the Stylyyards, *alias Guildhala Teutonicorum.*" In the year 1250, at the special intercession of Richard Earl of Cornwall, Henry the Third granted unto Lubecke, one of the Almain merchants, privileges for seven years; and in the same reign the sum of 30 marks was paid to the King by the citizens of Cologne to have seizin of their Guildhall in London. In 1256 he, at the wish of Henricke Duke of Brunswick, granted unto Lubecke and others privileges for ever. These were afterwards confirmed by his successors Edward the First, Second, and Third

It is presumed these concessions were an *acknowledgement* for services rendered by the Hanscatic vessels in time of war. By way of gratitude, the Steelyard merchants agreed to keep the Bishopsgate in repair, maintain it, and if necessary help to defend it against any foreign enemy.* In 1282 the gate was in a ruinous condition, and we find the citizens calling upon the company to fulfil its promises. The claim was rejected, and an appeal made to the Court of Exchequer, which resulted in a decision against the merchants, who were compelled to repair the said gate: Gerard Merbode, the alderman of the Hanse of

* Composition made between the citizens of London and the merchants of the Hanse of Almaine, as to the gate of Bysshopsgate.—*Liber Albus*, p. 417.

Almain, with six members of the guild, undertaking not only to pay the mayor, Henry le Waleys, and citizens, 240 marks towards the outlay, but agreeing hereafter to repair it, and bear a portion of the charge in money, and supply men to defend it in case of need. In consideration of this, additional liberties were conferred: they were for ever to be quit of Murage (the charge for repairing the city walls), and facilities were accorded them for the sale of corn and other goods.

In the reign of Henry the Sixth reverses began to fall on this hitherto thriving community. They were continually disputing with the native traders, and contentions ensued upon the seas, in which many vessels on both sides were captured, thus mutually hindering the successful prosecution of general commerce between England and the continent. The citizens felt that the Stylyard men should pay the same duties on their wine and wool as other foreign traders, and in 1469 it appears they were heavily fined in a sum amounting to 13,520*l.* besides their powers being greatly lessened. Some five years later it was found necessary that the matter should be settled by the English Parliament; and in a peace brought about at Utrecht, and ratified at Westminster, Henry VI. restored to the Hanse merchants their ancient rights. In 1493 they were again in trouble, and involved in a dispute with the citizens, whose feelings of dislike and jealousy were daily increasing against their foreign colleagues, in consequence of the latter entirely monopolising the privilege of importing Flemish cloth, and to a great extent damaging one of the principal branches of city trade.'

Henry VII. had no sympathy with the foreigners, and was only too glad of the opportunity of revenging himself upon them for their countenance to Perkin Warbeck; the result was the influx of a London mob and prentice riot at the Steelyard, occasioning great confusion and disorder, which was only stayed by the intervention of the Mayor and Aldermen. In this riot we read that the Drapers' Company paid 1*l.* 9*d.* for lights and banners, ale, candles, &c. in keeping men to watch the place for seventeen days against the rioters.

In Henry the Eighth's reign they fared somewhat better.

By an Act of Parliament it was decreed that they should be exempted from the payment of all King's taxes within the city.

In the Journal of King Edward the Sixth we find many notices of the contest then carried on between the merchants of the Steelyard and the Company of Merchant-Adventurers, which occupied the attention of the Privy Council during some months. The King first mentions the subject under the date of

1551-2, Jan. 18. This day the Stiliard put in their ansvere to a certain complaint that the Merchants-Adventurers laïd against them.

There are eight or ten other entries made by the King upon the subject,* but the most important is as follows:

Feb. 23. A decree was made by the board, that, upon knowledge and information of their charters [those of the Stiliard], they had found: First, that they were no sufficient corporation; Secondly, that, when they had forfeited their liberties, King Edward the Fourth did restore them on this condition, that they should colour no strangers' goods [*i.e.* that they should pass no goods of other foreigners through the Customs as if they were their own], which [yet] they had done. Also, that, whereas in the beginning they shipped not past eighty cloths, after 100, after 1,000, after that 6,000, now in their names was shipped 14,000 cloths in one year, and but 1,100 of all other strangers. For these considerations sentence was given that they had forfeited their liberties, and were in like case with other strangers.

This decree is entered at full in the register of the Privy Council,† and in the State Paper Office ‡ are statements “of the chief causes of the confiscation of the privileges of the Stiliard” (drawn by their opponents the native merchants,) being the same arguments at greater length as those of which we have the preceding summary from the hand of the young King. The particulars of their case are given at some length by Rapin, vol. ii. p. 24, and by Carte, vol. iii. p. 266.

Ambassadors came over from Hamburgh and Lubeck in order to speak on behalf of the Steelyard merchants, and endeavour to

* See *Literary Remains of King Edward VI.* edited by John Gough Nichols, esq. P.S.A. (Roxburghe Club, 1857), pp. 390-1, 401-3, 413, 429, 489, 507, 509.

† Of which a copy will be found in the British Museum, Addit. MSS. 14,026.

‡ Domestic; Edward VI. vol. xiv. Nos. 10 and 11.

induce the King to revoke his decision; but, under the date of the 1st of May, he records in his *Journal* that "the Stiliard men received their answer, which was to confirm the former judgement of my Council."

Notwithstanding the loss of their monopoly, the Germans for some time continued to trade on like conditions with other foreign merchants. But times had changed. The reign of Elizabeth was one for maritime enterprise; the love too of independence and that free-trading spirit natural to Englishmen daily became more manifest, and received fresh impulse from the exploits of Raleigh, Drake, Frobisher, Cavendish, and other distinguished adventurers of the period. Shipbuilding was on the increase, and one of the necessary results of this development was competition in trade and an extension of commerce, which destroyed that exclusiveness possessed by the Steelyard merchants. In the Egerton Papers (published by the Camden Society, 1840) occurs the final proclamation relative to their departure. By it Elizabeth ordered the Hanse traders to leave her dominions by the 28th January, 1598-9.* A petition was however presented by the Alderman and his company that a longer time should be given them on account of sundry debts, &c. that would "become due and answerable after the said day." A subsequent decree permitted them to remain in the Steelyard House until the last day of the next month, February, "or further, as our Council shall fynde our subjects well used, to enlarge the same tyme by their letters to be directed unto you." In spite of this, many remained behind, and, merging into general trade, endeavoured to preserve as many of their ancient privileges as the change of times would permit.

The customs of this society of merchants were curious. The members were never allowed to sleep away from the Steelyard or to keep a housekeeper, and, if any individual was discovered to have married an English woman, he was forthwith excommunicated and lost his house. As in modern companies, a board of directors transacted the general business, and amongst them

* Not the 28th of February, 1597-8, as stated in Cunningham's *Handbook for London*.

a kind of freemasonry existed, obliging them not to divulge any of their commercial transactions with the citizens. This assembly comprised representatives from the continental towns, who met every week on Wednesday evening.

Their house was next devoted to the service of the Queen's Navy, as appears by a letter addressed by the Council to the Lord Mayor, on the 30th Jan. in the same year, 1598-9, whereby he was required to deliver up the house of the Steelyard to the officers of her Majesty's Navy, "after the avoydinge and departinge of the strangers that did possess the house. That the said house of the Stiliards should be used and employed for the better bestowing and safe custodie of divers provisions of the Navy; the rent to be paid by the officers of the Navy." (Register of the Privy Council.)

The building was thus described by Stowe: "Their hall is large, built of stone, with three arched gates towards the street, the middlemost whereof is far bigger than the others, and is seldom opened. The other two be mured up. The same is now called the Old Hall."

The hall contained two of the finest works of Holbein, the *Triumph of Riches* and the *Triumph of Poverty*.* It has been suggested that these valuable pictures were taken to Flanders, thence to France, and by some were said to have at length found their resting-place at Darmstadt. It is, however, more probable that, being painted on the walls in distemper, they were destroyed at the Great Fire.†

In Elizabeth's reign the merchants attended divine service in Allhallows Church, and in Machyn's Diary, under date 1558, we find recorded the burial of one of their Aldermen in this place:‡ —

* See the paper on the works of Holbein executed in England, by A. W. Franks, esq. Director S.A. in the *Archæologia*, vol. xxxix. p. 6. Ample information respecting these pictures will be found in Mr. Wormum's work on Holbein (now in preparation). There are beautiful drawings from them in the national collection (print room) British Museum. The *Triumph of Poverty* was engraved by Vorsterman.

† The *Fire of London* papers among the Addit. MSS. in the British Museum, vol. xix. art. 7, contain some further information on the locality of the Steelyard.

‡ See *Diary of Henry Machyn, 1550 to 1563*, edited by John Gough Nichols, esq. F.S.A. (Camden Society, 1840), p. 174.

“ The xx day of September was bered at Gret All[hallows] in Temstrett, the Altherman of the Steleard, with ij whyt branchys and xij torchys, and iiij gret tapurs with”

In the present church there exists a handsome screen of oak, upon which is carved an eagle, the badge of the Hanse towns. This was presented to the parish by the Germans resident in London, it is said so late as the reign of Anne.*

Among other things the merchants were permitted to retail Rhenish wine, and a public-house near the church still reminds us of the ancient wine-house, the wonted resort of the citizens, and where they were accustomed to meet together and wile away their time. In one of Webster's plays, printed in 1607, entitled “ Westward Ho,” one Justiniano appoints a meeting with certain scholars and Sir Gosling Glowworm at the Rhenish Wine House in the Steelyard; and Thomas Nash, in his “ Picree Pennilesse,” makes a lazy fellow say, “ Men, when they are idle and know not what to do, saith one to the other, let us go to the Stillyard and drink Rhenish wine.”

At the time of the Great Fire the buildings of the Steelyard were entirely destroyed, but the merchants still held the site, and obtained a charter from Charles II. granting them permission to erect a church for themselves on a spot where one had formerly stood. Of these buildings some few remnants have been found. In the course of the present diggings several glazed tiles, pieces of carving, capitals of columns, and other objects of the period, have been discovered. When Malcolm wrote his History of London, in 1802, there was still a fragment of the old stone wall standing near the Thames, incorporated in a wall of modern brick, a fact which he somewhat mournfully mentions as being another memento of the mutabilities of charters and immunities granted *for ever*. The name, says he, “ of the Balance or Steelyard still exists, and, probably, will long exist, for who will trouble themselves to change the term?”

Since Malcolm wrote, the name, though *unchanged* to the last, is itself a matter of history—nothing now remains to remind us of

* Timbs's Curiosities of London.

its existence. In the autumn of 1863 the entire series of wharves and warehouses was removed for modern railway wants. Previous to the wholesale demolition, the Thames Street frontage was sketched by the late Mr. Wykeham Archer, and published in *Once a Week* with an account of the locality; this is, I believe, the only late engraving of the place, though in the same book is a copy of a drawing of its appearance from the river in 1543, by Antonio Van den Wyngreerde, an artist who came into this country with Philip of Spain at the time of his marriage with the Princess Mary of England. This drawing is preserved in the Bodleian Library. There are also, I believe, some outlines of the Steelyard limits to be seen in Hollar's view of London, 1641. Our friend Mr. Gardner informs me that with these exceptions there are no illustrations extant.

We have now to consider the nature of the excavations which have supplied us with the marvellous collection of relics exhibited. It is well known, that, to arrive at the solid clay in Thames Street for the purpose of planting foundations, a considerable depth must be attained. It must be remembered, that, apart from the accumulation of centuries since the Roman occupation, the levels of this neighbourhood were greatly altered at the time of the Great Fire. The slope of the various hills leading from Cannon Street to the river was entirely changed, and in Thames Street the roadway was in many places raised from 3 to 7 feet. In watching, therefore, the sinking of the shafts which were to receive the piers of the railway arches, it was possible to trace the successive mementoes of London's history from the last century back to the Roman period. There were the traders' tokens, bellarmines, and other late pottery, medieval spurs, daggers, objects in leather, and lastly occurred the coins, styli, pins in bone and bronze, personal ornaments, &c. associated with quantities of the bright red Samian pottery. From 20 to 25 feet appeared to be the average depth of the Roman level, and here, driven into the clay along the whole extent of the excavations, were numerous piles and transverse beams extending right across the street, and forming a complete network of timber. Many of these beams measured as much as 18 inches square, and all were of great

strength and durability. They doubtless formed the old water-line and Thames embankment fronting the southern portion of Roman London. Such beams were observed on both sides of the street, and many had probably been supports for the Roman buildings which so plentifully existed in the neighbourhood of Bush Lane and Scots Yard. Towards Cannon Street were large masses of Roman masonry, such as have been described by Mr. Roach Smith in the twenty-ninth volume of the *Archæologia*. Much of this had to be removed, and it was interesting to observe how completely the old walls defied the appliances of modern engineering, the necessary dislodgements being only effected by the aid of gunpowder; in some cases, I believe, the veritable *Roman* walls now form foundations for the support of the railway arches. In some places could be detected the junction of the clay and gravel with the soft black earth and refuse, betokening the old course of the Wall-brook, which at Dowgate dock flowed into the Thames. From the great quantity of antiquities, it has been suggested that this particular spot may have been an ancient rubbish-shoot, such as the celebrated pit at the Royal Exchange. The beautiful preservation of the coins and metal objects favours the idea that the whole had been formerly covered by the Thames.

The Roman antiquities present few peculiarities. There is a great scarcity of objects of unique or peculiar rarity in all excavations in the metropolis; rarely do we meet with the bronzes, glass, and fibulæ, of such magnificence as in some other parts of England. Those from London are usually of a humbler class.

We must, however, except those unsurpassed works in bronze discovered in the Thames, and figured in Mr. Roach Smith's "*Illustrations of Roman London*." The heroic head of the Emperor Hadrian has, Mr. Smith believes, belonged to a statue set up to commemorate the advent of Hadrian to Britain; the Apollo, the Mercury, and others, are the perfection of art; the Archer found in Queen Street is the finest statuette from the ground of ancient London; the rest referred to are from the Thames. "They bespeak," says Mr. Smith in a private letter,

"the importance of Londinium, and it would be wonderful if at the present day, after 1300 years of spoliation of every kind, such works were to be picked up daily. It was quite a matter of accident that these were found and preserved. One never hears of what had been found in previous times: the silence is not conclusive of paucity of remains, but of long centuries of destruction, through the bigotry and ignorance of the immediate successors of the Romans, and the apathy and ignorance of subsequent ages and modern days."

From the Steelyard there is a very elegant bronze in low relief, respecting which various conjectures have been made. Mr. Smith pronounces it a figure of Hope; and he refers to the coins of Claudius, with a similar figure, inscribed "SPES AVGVSTA." It seems to have been affixed to a coffer or to some object as a decoration. It is now in the possession of Mr. Cecil Brent, to whom we owe so much for the interest he has so successfully taken in the antiquities of Roman London.

Of coins may be selected large and middle brass of Claudius, Nero, Vespasian, and Domitian; but their reverses are all well known.

Pottery is well represented, large quantities of Samian having been found, including some fine examples, bearing *incuse* patterns, which are extremely uncommon. There are also some good specimens of Upchurch pottery; one of the black vessels appears to have had a handle, and is of an unusual type.

In glass there are pieces known as pillar moulding, which are very rare in London, though in some parts of England perfect vessels of this kind have at times been found, and are duly recorded in Mr. Roach Smith's "Collectanea Antiqua," as well as in his "Roman London." Pins, needles, knives, and spoons have been found in large numbers both in bone and bronze. Among the spoons is a perfect example of the long-stemmed spoon, with a narrow bowl at one end and an oblong termination at the other. Such are figured by Mr. Roach Smith, who considers them to have been employed in extracting unguents, &c. from the small long-necked bottles familiarly known as lachrymatories. Two

of similar form were, he says, discovered in a metal case with a box of colours, and a variety of implements and glass bottles, in the grave of a female painter near Fontenay;* and, as the whole of the minor objects clearly appertained to the profession of the defunct, these spoons were doubtless used for extracting liquids from the bottles for mixing and preparing colours, in which process the oblong ends were probably of service. We have also some good Roman keys, a few fibulæ, the beam of a pair of scales, and, among the minor relics, a little fish-hook; a plentiful supply too of Roman leather. Some of the sandals are beautifully preserved, and indicate the moisture of the soil in which they were embedded. Most of these (as is usual) are of small and medium size, having doubtless belonged to females and young people; but there are those that have evidently belonged to the other sex. The round-topped nails with which the soles are so densely studded are, with other appearances of strength, evidences that they once belonged to feet accustomed to a firm and heavy tread. Medieval shoes too are to be seen in profusion, and some good examples have been found of dagger-sheaths of the same period stamped and figured in great variety. There is also an example of the dagger known in the fourteenth century as the "Misericorde," used in combat to give the death-blow by the soldier to his fallen opponent. In many of our monumental brasses this type of weapon may be seen, and it appears admirably adapted for penetrating the chinks in the armour of the time. The earliest example known is in the Meyrick collection, and is of the time of King Henry VI.

Leaden signacula, well known as pilgrim's signs, are also very numerous; indeed they form a series that have not, I think, been equalled in any previous find. It is singular that so many well-preserved examples should be discovered in one place: many of those now exhibited are similar to the specimens described by the Rev. Thomas Hugo, F.S.A. in the *Archæologia*, vol. xxxviii., which were found at Dowgate. We have the familiar head of St. Thomas of Canterbury under a foliated canopy, with the words CAPVT THOME well defined; an interesting figure of the

* "Illustrations of Roman London."

Bishop Erasmus in the attitude of benediction;* and a beautiful figure of the Saviour on the Cross, the limbs of the cross terminating in fleurs-de-lis. There is also a female figure crowned, and attired in the costume of about the time of Richard II. It is uncertain to what shrine this may have belonged.

The initial letter K, which forms one of the number, is said by Mr. Hugo to refer to Kenulph, King of Mercia, whose tomb at Winchcombe in Gloucestershire was reputed to be endowed with miraculous virtues. There are various figures of the Virgin and Child, one with a radiated head; and numerous small brooches, where she appears to be standing on a ship crowned, holding the infant Jesus, and in her hand a sceptre.

Such are the chief points of interest belonging to the more conspicuous of these antiquities. They are for the most part contributed by Mr. T. D. E. Gunston and Mr. Cecil Brent; the remainder are in my own collection.

* This sign has been lately described by Mr. Syer Cuming in the *Journal* of the British Archaeological Association.